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Department of State

OUTGOING TELEGRAM

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ORIGIN ARA-16

INFO OCT-00 EUR-12 EA-12 IO-15 ADS-00 SIG-03 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-02
SPRS-02 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00
INRE-00 HA-06 OCS-06 CA-01 SY-05 SYE-00 DCT-02
EB-03 AID-07 PC-05 USSS-00 SR-04 OMB-01 TRSE-00
ACDA-12 /158 R

DRAFTED BY ARA/CEN:RCBROWN
APPROVED BY ARA/CEN:JDBLACKEN
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR IMMEDIATE
INFO ALL AMERICAN REPUBLIC DIPLOMATIC POSTS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BERN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY VIENNA IMMEDIATE
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PANAMA IMMEDIATE

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BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USEEC; ROME ALSO FOR VATICAN

E.O. 12065: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, ES

SUBJECT: STATEMENT ON EL SALVADOR -- DEATH OF THE AMERICAN

1. THE DEPARTMENT'S SPOKESMAN MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMEN AT THE NOON BRIEFING.

2. BEGIN TEXT: OVERNIGHT OUR EMBASSY IN SAN SALVADOR CONFIRMED THAT THE FOUR AMERICAN WOMEN WHO DISAPPEARED TUESDAY EVENING ARE DEAD.

WE ARE SHOCKED AND DISMAYED BY THESE BRUTAL MURDERS. ON BEHALF OF SECRETARY MUSKIE I WANT TO EXTEND SINCERE CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILIES, FRIENDS, AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES OF THE VICTIMS.

WE DO NOT HAVE A COMPLETE PICTURE OF THE FACTS IN THIS TRAGIC INCIDENT. HOWEVER, REPORTS OF INVOLVEMENT OF SECURITY FORCES ARE A MATTER OF DEEPEST CONCERN.

PENDING CLARIFICATION OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE KILLINGS WE ARE PUTTING A HOLD ON ALL ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMITMENTS. END TEXT.

3. THE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS BELOW WERE PREPARED FOR THE DECEMBER 5 NOON BRIEFING AND THE SPOKESMAN DREW UPON THEM. A TRANSCRIPT OF THE REMARKS ON EL SALVADOR WILL BE TRANSMITTED WHEN AVAILABLE.

BEGIN TEXT:

Q: CAN YOU CONFIRM PRESS REPORTS THAT THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLINGS?

A: WE CAN'T CONFIRM RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE MURDERS AT THIS TIME. THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT HAS PLEDGED A FULL INVESTIGATION, AND THAT HAS ALREADY BEGUN. WE ARE NOT GOING TO MAKE ANY JUDGMENT ON WHO MAY HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE UNTIL WE HAVE THE RESULTS OF THE OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION IN HAND.

Q: WHAT ABOUT REPORTS THAT A SALVADORAN PATROL STOPPED OTHER CHURCH PEOPLE ON THE SAME ROAD THAT NIGHT?

A: WE UNDERSTAND THAT A GROUP OF CANADIAN MISSIONARIES WAS STOPPED ABOUT THREE MILES FROM THE SAN SALVADOR AIRPORT BY A GROUP OF UNIFORMED AND ARMED MEN AT ABOUT 6:00 PM ON THE EVENING OF DECEMBER 2. THEIR VEHICLE WAS SEARCHED AND THEY WERE ALLOWED TO PROCEED. THE AMERICANS PRESUMABLY PASSED DOWN THE SAME ROAD SOMETIME AFTER THE CANADIANS ON THEIR WAY INTO THE CAPITAL.

Q: HAS THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT ADMITTED THAT THEY STATIONED AN OFFICIAL PATROL ON THE ROAD ON THAT NIGHT?

A: THAT IS ONE OF THE THINGS THAT WE ARE TRYING TO DETERMINE. WE DON'T KNOW AT THIS POINT.

Q: WHAT HAS THE UNITED STATES DONE ABOUT THIS SITUATION?

A: A CONSTANT CONTACT BETWEEN THE EMBASSY AND SALVADORAN OFFICIALS HAS BEEN MAINTAINED SINCE THE NUNS WERE FIRST REPORTED MISSING. AMBASSADOR WHITE MADE OUR GRAVE CONCERN ABOUT THE INCIDENT KNOWN TO THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT AT ITS HIGHEST LEVELS. HE ALSO HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE CHURCH MEMBERS OF THE PARISH OF ONE OF THE DEAD NUNS AS WELL AS AUTHORITIES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE. YESTERDAY WHITE WAS AT THE SCENE WHEN THE BODIES WERE EXHUMED AND HELPED IN THEIR IDENTIFICATION. EMBASSY STAFF REMAINS IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH MILITARY AND POLICE AUTHORITIES CONCERNING THE INVESTIGATION.

Q: ARE YOU PLANNING TO BREAK RELATIONS, AS SOME PEOPLE HAVE SUGGESTED?

A: BREAKING RELATIONS WOULD SOLVE NOTHING. WE PLAN TO CONTINUE EFFORTS TO DETERMINE THE FACTS.

Q: YOU MENTIONED ASSISTANCE IN YOUR STATEMENT. WHAT ABOUT ASSISTANCE IN THE PIPELINE.

A: MY STATEMENT IS CLEAR ON THIS POINT.

Q: BUT ISN'T THIS LATEST INCIDENT, COUPLED WITH THE KILLING LAST WEEK OF THE LEFTIST LEADERS, FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT AT BEST HAS LOST CONTROL OF THE SITUATION, OR AT WORST, IS A PARTICIPANT IN THESE KILLINGS?

A: I WOULD NOT WANT TO ATTEMPT TO EVALUATE THIS TRAGIC INCIDENT IN BROADER TERMS AT THIS POINT. FOR THE MOMENT, WE ARE FACED WITH THE BRUTAL MURDER OF FOUR INNOCENT AMERICAN CITIZENS. WE HAVE DEPLORED AND CONDEMNED THE VIOLENCE THERE. WE CONTINUE TO DO SO.

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Q: WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE FUTURE OF THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE LAST WEEK?

A: RECENT EVENTS REPRESENT A SETBACK FOR SALVADORAN MODERATES WHO SEEK TO PACIFY THE COUNTRY, CONSOLIDATE REFORM MEASURES, PROMOTE RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND INITIATE A DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PROCESS. IT WOULD NOT BE USEFUL TO SPECULATE BEYOND THIS.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT ON THE REPORT FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL THAT SAYS THERE IS "OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE" OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF SALVADORAN TROOPS IN THE KILLING OF THE SIX LEFTIST LEADERS LAST WEEK?

A: FROM PRESS REPORTS WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE BASIS FOR THE AI CONCLUSION THAT SALVADORAN TROOPS WERE INVOLVED IS THE PRESS REPORT THAT THE SEMINARY FROM WHICH THE ABDUCTIONS TOOK PLACE WAS SURROUNDED BY 200 GOVERNMENT TROOPS. OUR REPORTS -- GATHERED FROM EYE-WITNESSES, FROM AUTHORITIES AT THE SEMINARY, AND FROM THE PRESS -- SHOW THAT THERE WAS A SINGLE, UNCONFIRMED PRESS REPORT OF TROOPS SURROUNDING THE SEMINARY. THIS REPORT WAS NEVER CONFIRMED BY EYEWITNESSES OR ANYBODY ELSE. THE INFORMATION WEHAVE, WITH THEEXCEPTION OF THIS SINGLE REPORT, ALL INDICATES THAT THERE WERE NO UNIFORMED GOVERNMENT TROOPS PRESENT AT THE SEMINARY AT THE TIME OF THE ABDUCTION.

Q: DOESN'T THE MURDER OF THE NUNS UNDERMINE THE US POSITION WITH REGARD TO SUPPORTING EL SALVADOR?

A: WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE INCIDENT, AS I HAVE SAID. OUR POSITION HAS BEEN TO SUPPORT MODERATE ELEMENTS SEEKING REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT, RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. THIS CONTINUES TO BE OUR POSITION.
END TEXT.

CHRISTOPHER